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- Discourse - 1834.

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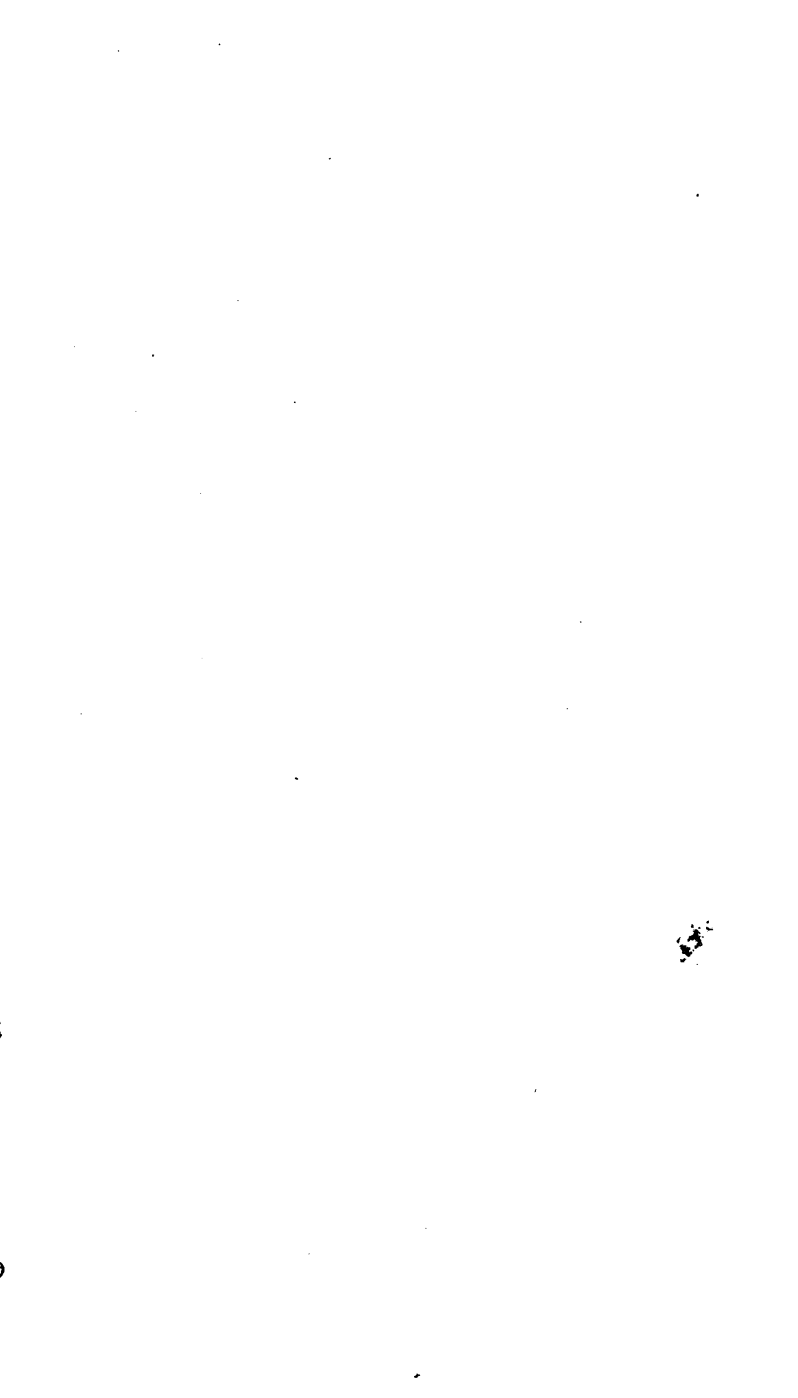
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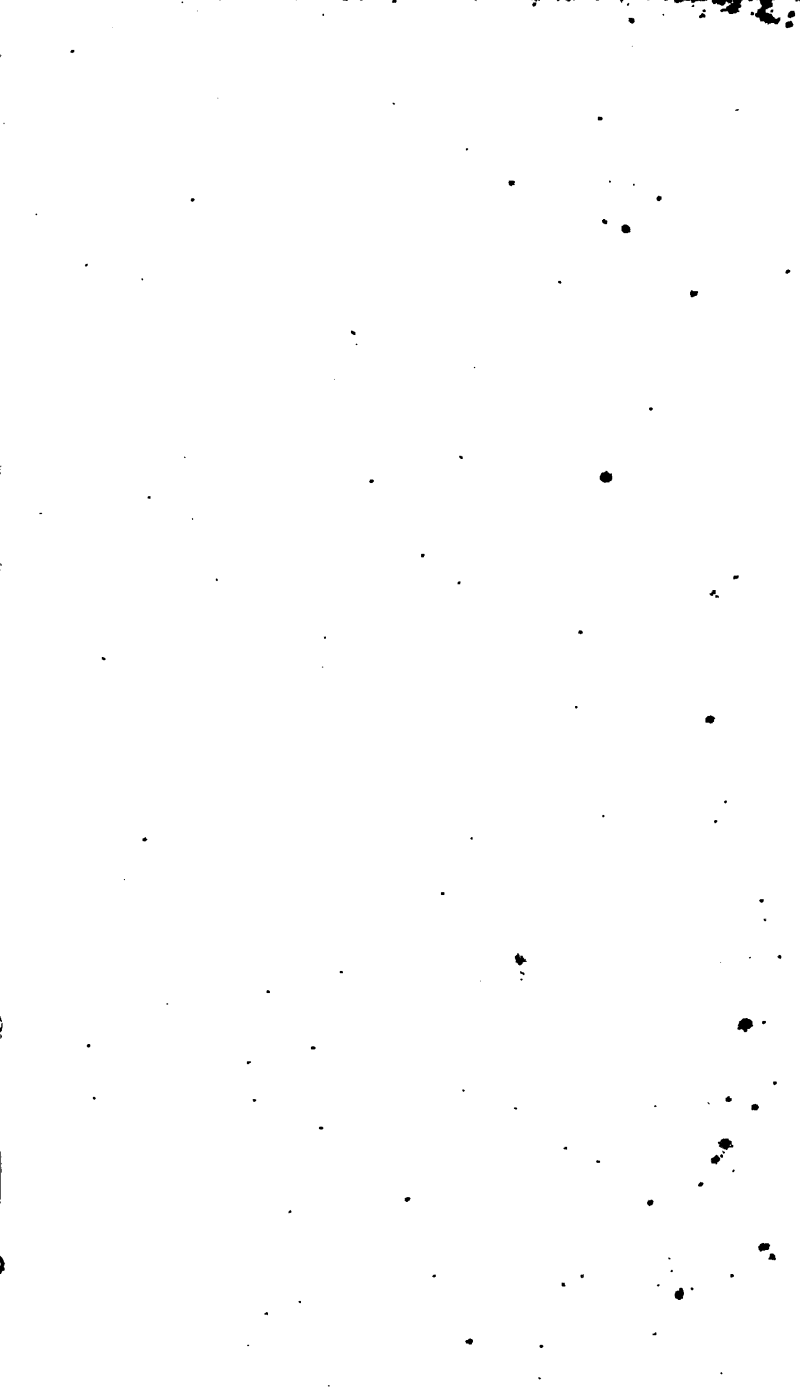


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THE
INFLUENCE OF MORAL CAUSES
UPON
OPINION, SCIENCE, AND LITERATURE.

A DISCOURSE
DELIVERED ON
THE DAY PRECEDING THE ANNUAL COMMENCEMENT
OF
AMHERST COLLEGE,
AUGUST 27TH, 1834,
AT THE REQUEST OF THE LITERARY SOCIETIES OF THAT
INSTITUTION.

BY GULIAN C. VERPLANCK,
LL.D., *Amh. Coll.*

Est intellectus humanus instar speculi inæqualis ad radios rerum, qui suam naturam naturæ rerum immiscet eamque detorquet et inficit.—BACON.

NEW-YORK:
HARPER AND BROTHERS.

M DCCC XXXIV.

THE
INFLUENCE OF MORAL CAUSES
UPON
OPINION, SCIENCE, AND LITERATURE.



D I S C O U R S E .

DURING the last year the partiality of one of the colleges of my native state of New-York selected me for the discharge of a literary duty similar to the one with which your kindness has now honoured me. In performing that duty, I endeavoured to call the attention of my young hearers—who, like yourselves, were soon to join in the throng and participate in the struggles of active life—to the consideration of those moral uses and influences that ought rightly to flow from their recent studies and acquirements.* The business of the scholar was, I urged, the study of truth,—of truth, either necessary, as in mathematical, and, to some extent, in moral speculation,—or else universal or general, as in the investigation of nature and the analysis and classification of the complex phenomena presented to our senses. Truth, too,—in another sense,—the truth of human nature, is the source of all literary control, and grace,

* Discourse delivered after the commencement of Geneva College, 1833.

and interest ; for it is the reality or the faithful echo of human feeling alone that can awaken and keep alive human sympathy ; and without these, literary fame and influence must be but local and ephemeral.

But the natural and legitimate tendency of the knowledge and feeling of all sorts of truth, though capable of abuse and perversion—must be, cannot but be, in unison with sound morals. The enlightened understanding gives light to the conscience ; the genius, once fired by the contemplation of man's duties and powers and of his Maker's wisdom, will warm the affections and heart. Any other result—and quite another result is but too frequent—is the deliberate and wicked perversion of Heaven's best gifts entrusted to the discretion of man, and a violation of the declared design of their Author legibly inscribed upon them. The gifts of science and learning bear upon them the evidence that they were designed for the diffusion of happiness and for the elevation of the human race in the scale of universal being. They were confided to man that he might be the instrument of beneficence towards his race. The pervading fact that the results of science and the accumulations of knowledge are far beyond the means of any single and unaided intellect to work out for itself, reads to the scholar the silent but impressive lesson, that, as he owes these treasures to the conjoint labours of many others, so it is also for the good of others that he is bound to employ them.

The difficulties and doubts that overcloud our best knowledge show us our weakness and teach us humility, whilst the grandeur of the Creator's works and laws places in the strongest light, by the contrast, the littleness of all human pride, the falseness of the glories, and the insignificance of the vexations of life. The discipline of the mind in the search for scientific truth habituates the student to the consideration of leading principles on all subjects, and can thus emancipate him (unless he make himself a voluntary slave) from the control of mere authority, of interest, of habit, or of passion, in the formation of those opinions which are to be the guides of intelligent action in life. Thus may he be enabled to preserve for himself a consistency of character and thought, above the fluctuations and continual self-contradictions of sects and parties, above the temptations of personal interests, above the weakness and caprices of passion and pride, of base fear or low desire. Taught to strive for the dominion of truth and not for the victory of party, he will find, in that reverence for truth as an ultimate end, a sure antidote to the bitter poison of intolerance. Thus, the larger and the clearer his views of creation and its mighty laws, of man and his mysterious powers, duties, and destinies, the more distinct ought naturally to become his perception of moral accountability, the greater, too, may be his freedom from the thralldom of sense, and the nobler his capacity for beneficent action.

But whilst such are the right and natural, they are, unhappily, by no means, the necessary influences of these rich gifts and glorious privileges. Mathematical and physical science may but furnish arms to tyranny, or, worse than that, forge the weapons of sophistry against the dearest consolations and hopes of man. The imagination, cultivated by taste, enriched by learning, may become—as it, indeed, has too often actually become!—incorporate with and subservient to the poorest lusts ; so that, like the foul sorceress described by *Milton* as keeping hell's adamantine gates, whilst it rears its goodly front towards the skies, beaming with seductive beauty, it, at the same time, winds its poisonous length in many a scaly fold, far along upon the earth ;

————— a serpent armed
With mortal sting. —————

Such is the dread responsibility accompanying the gifts of talent and knowledge—such their benign, natural use—such and so dire their effect when abused.

With topics and arguments like these, I endeavoured to impress upon the young and ardent minds whom I then addressed, the conviction that knowledge was not merely power, but that it ought to be, and might be virtue. It was a grand and fertile subject, to which the best powers of reasoning and eloquence would have scarcely been able to do justice within the narrow limits of a single academic discourse. In tracing, therefore,

imperfectly (as it could not but be) the mutual connexion of intellectual improvement and acquirement, with the moral disposition, temper, and principles of conduct, I was compelled to restrict myself to a part only of my subject. I spoke but of the right and proper influence of mental cultivation upon moral improvement, leaving aside all consideration of that reciprocal action, whereby sound morals, benevolent desires, and holy aspirations, can purify and exalt the intellect, so that whilst the mental sight is cleansed from that film which darkens its perception of moral right, it also acquires a keener and truer vision for all the objects even of natural or political science, for every thing that concerns the wants, interests, happiness, and power of social beings.

It is to the consideration of some hasty views upon this subject that I now crave your attention. It is a theme well suiting such an occasion as this, since it is to you, my friends, and such as you, fresh from the pursuits of science and the study of the great works of ancient genius, and animated with the still thrilling sense of the glories and excellence of learning, that our country must chiefly look hereafter, for the formation of its most important opinions, and the creation and diffusion of that literature which gives to a nation its form and character, and sways its future destinies.

In every walk of scientific research, the student is struck with one grand and controlling principle. He sees, throughout the whole, one vast harmony and cor-

respondence of all the laws of the Creator's action and government. Myriads of insulated facts, collected by observation, group themselves together under general resemblances of kind, and are resolved into universal laws. The comparison of these more general expressions of physical knowledge with each other, and with the necessary truths of number and figure, lead to still more striking views of the unity and correspondence of all and each of them. All the discoveries of science constantly lead on their own simplification, because they unveil more and more the operations of one all-wise mind producing the grandest and most varied results by the fewest and simplest principles and rules of being and of power.

To the earlier astronomers, the phenomena of the heavens presented a thousand dissimilar appearances, until their map of the skies was "with cycles and epicycles scribbled o'er," in the vain effort to reduce to rule the motions of the planetary bodies by bold conjecture. But the progress of science, whilst it has multiplied the facts of observation a thousand-fold, has resolved them all into the simple and sublime operation of the one great principle of gravitation, pervading all known creation, connecting alike the most distant periods of duration, and the most remote regions of space, under one common law; and whilst explaining the movements of whole systems of suns and revolving planets, reducing their orbits to the government of the same rule which

regulates the falling of heavy bodies, and the swinging of the pendulum upon our little earth. Nor is this admirable and beautiful harmony by any means limited to material nature. The moral nature of man is suited to his physical condition, and harmonizes with it in exquisite adaptation. Those philosophical thinkers and reasoners, who, from the days of the wise son of Sirach to the humble and sagacious Butler, guiding their cautious steps by the slender and delicate thread of analogy, have been led onward, from the facts of the natural world, to the vindication of the "ways of God to man," have testified how the constitution of nature, as it appears in all that surrounds us, answers to and gives evidence of that far higher and more lasting constitution of God's moral government of his intelligent beings, so that "all things are double, one against another." It is in conformity with this comprehensive harmony that the Creator seems to have ordained a like connexion between Truth and Goodness ; so that as Truth is the natural teacher of Goodness, Goodness is again the surest guide to Truth. This is no arbitrary appointment of the Supreme Ruler, without any other reason than his good pleasure. Like all the other arrangements and ordinances of Almighty Wisdom, within the comprehension of man, it appears to be the result of design ; the Creator choosing to obtain his mighty ends, not by the simple exertion of power, but by the use and combination of fitting means. For, look at the operations of our own minds. When are

they best fitted for the investigation of truth, for the study of wisdom, for the right contemplation of excellence? Not surely when they are excited by the fevered gaiety of pleasure, when they are kindled by wrath, fretted and irritated by envy and resentment, or swollen by pride; or when the desire of wealth, or the lust of power, has taken possession of the soul, and lords it, without a rival, over its faculties. Such causes of excitement may, each and all of them, give strength and intensity to the mind's efforts for the attainment of any of its favourite objects, or even for the gratification of its lowest desires. But surely, for all great and worthy subjects of pursuit or of contemplation, the intellect is then most vigorous when it is least distracted by passion; it is clearest when it is most calm; brightest when it is most pure. Then is the mind's eye most clear and far-seeing when it can most boldly and steadily fix its gaze upon the fountain of light; when it does not habitually contract itself to the small objects of time and sense that float before it. Then is the wing of Genius strongest and steadiest when it aims its flight the highest above the fogs and clouds of human passions and desires. Then is practical talent most efficiently, most successfully employed, even though it be in the humblest walks of its exercise, when it labours not to satisfy its own little ambitions, or envies, or jealousies, but when benevolence, or duty, when patriotism, or charity, or friendship guide and animate its energies. If such is the unfailing result as to all moral

inquiries and social duties, it is scarcely less so in relation to speculative science, whether physical or intellectual.

There is a dogma taught in some schools of metaphysics, that belief is wholly involuntary ; and that as opinions must depend entirely upon the reasons presented to the mind's consideration, they can have no moral character, good or evil. If this doctrine be true, it would seem to follow, that belief and opinion must be just as independent of all moral influences in their origin and formation, as they are in their issue and character. This is a dogma that has passed from the books and schools of philosophy to the forum and the senate, furnished argument for the grave review and the popular harangue, and has served as the foundation of reasoning and declamation, sometimes in the cause of sceptical indifference, and sometimes, better employed, in the service of toleration and equal laws. It contains a remarkable mixture of truth and error, and the limits of each are indicated and well defined by the purposes to which the doctrine has been applied, and by the consequences deduced from it. As applied to enforce a liberal and just tolerance of sentiment towards difference of faith or opinion, it points out correctly the numerous sources of innocent error, from some one or other of which no mind can be wholly exempt. There are the errors of involuntary ignorance ; there are those springing from ideas early instilled by education, and strengthened by youthful associations—unfounded, unexamined, it may probably be—unsuspected,

but yet inwrought deeply into our dearest sympathies and best affections ; there are errors from erroneous information, and facts believed on authority respectable in itself, or venerable in our eyes from gratitude or love, from custom or prejudice ; errors, again, arising from the peculiar personal character of the individual, his turn of thought, his capacity for reasoning, his desires, appetites, habits, his very physical constitution, and circumstances in life. Thus it may often happen that the mixture and association of the best sentiments and the most essential truths with baser materials, are often as real and as excusable causes of error as perfectly involuntary ignorance. Involuntary ignorance, moreover, in a being so limited as individual man, whilst the collective knowledge and the pressing duties of his species are so vast, is by no means confined to the least informed portions of society. It may be found where it is least suspected, and often in company with large acquisitions in other respects. As, then, correct deductions can be drawn only from the facts and arguments actually comprehended by the mind, error may thus be pardonable, be innocent, be virtuous. In the honest language of the sternest and most uncompromising of modern controversialists,* “ though truth can be but on one side, sincerity may be on both.” Such is the lesson of tolerance for his fellows, that the contemplation of man’s weakness and fallibility ought to teach him. But a closer inspection of our own minds and hearts will show us yet other principles at

* Horsey. .

work in the formation of opinion, always operating upon such opinions as are connected with the conduct and business of life, or the regulation of the heart and the desires—often affecting the speculative reason, and sometimes even the observations and conclusions of physical philosophy. The mind has a strange capacity of deceiving itself, as to what is, or is not, the just inference of the evidence within its reach. It can wilfully turn away altogether from the most important considerations, or pass them over with a slight and careless glance. It can fasten its whole or its chief attention upon some single point favourable to its own preconceived notions, to the party it has espoused, to its accidental loves, or hates, or caprices. It can deceive itself by resting implicitly upon some single strong and easily comprehended argument, on the one side ; whilst it impatiently turns away from the far stronger opposing demonstration that results from a numerous and complicated, but united authority of facts and reasons. It can view things, not as they appear in the clear, colourless ray of reason, but as they show discoloured by interest, prejudice, or ridicule, according as the fashion of the world throws upon them the many changing colours of its ever-turning prism. It can acquiesce in the first plausible conclusions that may coincide with the interests or the fancies of the individual, and resolve to think no further. It can obstinately shrink back from the painful task of unsettling early opinions, and plucking up maxims and

doctrines that have been implanted early, and have entwined their roots with every fibre. The prejudiced individual may (to borrow the Baconian imagery) obstinately refuse to look forth into the broad daylight, and perversely form his judgment of all things from those dim shadows that flit across the darkened cavern of his intellect, where he has erected the shrine of the idol of his secret worship, upon whose altars sometimes truth and sometimes virtue is the sacrifice. Facts may be assumed upon authority, without investigation, because we wish them to be true, and would rather take them as such, than undergo the labour of examination, with the hazard of enduring the mortification of finding them refuted. Nay more, experience has a thousand times shown, what otherwise would seem incredible, that when the strongest and clearest evidence has been forced upon the mind, its power can be completely deadened and resisted by mere habit, or pure mental indolence. Above all, words, mere words, may be taken without ever weighing their real meaning, or considering whether they have any meaning at all, and pass so current for realities, that thus a man may go through life in the loud and fervent profession of doctrines or facts, without the slightest suspicion that he is utterly ignorant of what those facts or doctrines may be—without realizing them in any actual application to nature or life, and, it may be, in the daily contradiction of his personal conduct to the words constantly upon his tongue. Thus it is, in another view of

the question, that error may be very far from guiltless ; that the moral faculties have much to do in the formation of opinion and the discovery of truth. From all this it follows, that the true philosophy of the laws of belief, on the one hand, bids us beware of too hasty and confident a reliance on our own judgment, and, still more, of rash scorn for the minds, or hatred for the persons, of those who range themselves under opposing banners to our own on the great questions which divide society ; whilst, on the other side, it teaches us no less imperatively that we are morally accountable for the right operations of our intellect, and the proper use of the means of ascertaining truth, placed within our reach.

Foremost in the list of those virtues which are to be cultivated, not only for their own sake, but because they give energy to intellect, and diffuse light and heat through every region of man's speculative reason and practical understanding, is the Love of Truth. It was well said by the most sagacious and acute, and yet the most humble, patient, and cautious reasoner of the last age, (Bishop Butler,) that the great intellectual vice of the readers and students of modern times is, that their " desire is not to know what is true, so much as what has been said on any subject :"—in other language, they wish to acquire learning rather than wisdom, words rather than principles, to become able to talk largely, rather than to judge wisely.

The naked desire of knowledge may be considered as

a mere instinct of our nature ;—a rational instinct, when it covets objects of inquiry fitted to engage our reason, but becoming mere idle curiosity when it turns wholly to petty objects and trifling inquiries, the solace of indolence, that dreads vacuity, and fears labour. This natural propensity, then, only assumes the character of virtue when it becomes the desire of gaining knowledge and possessing truth, solely for their own sakes, as objects and ends worthy the pursuit, and fitting the capacities of an immortal mind, or, if viewed as means at all, only as the means of effecting greater good to man, or of more worthily serving the Giver of all wisdom. Then is this desire most truly a virtue when it is most pure from the mixture of all other and personal motives—when the knowledge to be gained and the talent won are not looked for to serve as the food of vanity, or the instruments of ambition, to aid in satisfying the craving for notoriety, or the lust of power. Would you know what is the effect of such mixed motives upon science? Look back upon its history. Take, for instance, those parts of physical science where one would think moral motives could least operate. Antiquity might boast of minds as acute, as daring, as inquisitive, as comprehensive, as patient of labour, as eager for glory, as any that later times have produced. Why, then, did these great men, the doctors of the Portico or the Academy, or those earlier Eastern sages from whom they acquired their first lights, or the no less laborious and subtle disputants

of the middle ages, to whom they handed down their vain and empty wisdom—why were all these so long bewildered in the maze of words? It was simply because they sought not so much truth itself as glory to themselves—not the knowledge of what is, but the victory of their party and the fame of its leaders. These self-styled lovers of wisdom, instead of being humble seekers for truth, were the ambitious heads of literary factions, struggling for popular favour, and anxious to gain fame by dazzling novelty of hypothesis, by ingenious conjecture, by eloquent declamation, or by acute and perplexing verbal subtilty of argument, proud to baffle their opponents by sophism, nor ashamed to overwhelm them by dogmatical denunciation. Hence, for century after century, whilst art advanced slowly, and but slowly, as it must ever do when unaided by reasoning from the more general laws of nature which govern its particular applications—all that called itself science was a jargon of words, or at best a system of plausible conjectures. I need not tell you how all this was dispersed into thin air by the philosophy of Bacon indicating those laws of laws that guide to the right study of nature, and, still more, by the successful application of that speculative philosophy by Newton and his followers. What is most to our present purpose, in the history of that great philosophical revolution, is, that it was mainly a reformation in the moral character of physical investigation. It is in the greater simplicity of spirit with

which truth has been sought—in the comparative rejection of party spirit and pride of opinion—in the frank confession of the imperfections of our actual knowledge—in the increasing conviction of the inability of our limited minds to comprehend all the multiplied relations of the works of infinite wisdom and power—in the consequent lowly accuracy of observation and conscientious honesty of statement—in the willingness to surrender the pride of fancied knowledge whenever new and surer light opened upon the inquirer—in all these moral causes, far more than in the profoundest wisdom of Bacon, the most patient investigation, the grandest and broadest inductions of Newton, or the most sagacious and delicate analysis of the chemists of our own age, do we behold the chief fountains of those floods of science which now pour themselves forth on every side, to fertilize and gladden the world. Or rather let us say, that in Bacon's profound speculation—in the grand, experimental, and inductive investigations of Newton—in the sagacious and powerful analysis of Davy or Berzelius, we see but the natural workings, the products and fruits of these moral causes. These have made physical philosophy to lay aside its proud reasoning, as to what must be, and what ought to be, and content itself with the diligent and faithful search of the knowledge of what is.

The founders of preceding systems, from Thales to Descartes, framed their ingenious and hasty theories, in the proud confidence of genius, as the monuments of their

own glory. Their doctrines came complete and perfect from the minds of these sagacious and inventive authors ; they were comprehended at once by their disciples ; they had their day of fame, until the next great accession to human knowledge presented facts utterly in contradiction to their hypotheses, and they crumbled at once into dust. Newton considered himself but as the lowly interpreter of nature, whose language he professed to understand darkly, and only in part. Hence, his philosophy passes not away, but, susceptible of continual developement and improvement, can now explain facts utterly unknown to its founder, and every new achievement of physical investigation, or of mathematical genius, instead of overthrowing or shaking its solidity, but tends to its enlargement and perfection.

Still, let us not be too loud and bold in our exultation. Let us not too complacently contrast our superiority in that moral wisdom whence sound knowledge springs, with the faults and errors of our ancestors.

The ascending day-star with a bolder eye
Hath lit each dew-drop on our trimmer lawn !
Yet not for this, if wise, will we decry
The spots and struggles of the timid Dawn,
Lest so we tempt the approaching Noon to scorn
The mists and painted vapours of our Morn.*

A purer religion has beamed upon us, giving light by its very reflection, even to those who turn away their eyes

* Coleridge.

and hide their faces from its direct rays. A thousand foul and monstrous forms of error, that roamed like hideous spectres through the darkness of former ages, have been put to flight. Men have learned to know and to assert the rights of private conscience; and habitual freedom of inquiry and discussion has taught them to raise their eyes from the ground, and to look boldly in the face of every claim upon their faith or credulity.

Yet, with all these advantages, this comparative freedom from the dominion of external influences, the encouragement of so many and such brilliant examples of devotion to scientific truth, and of glorious success in its pursuit, the blaze of light surrounding us, the exciting atmosphere of free inquiry and bold discussion, that we hourly breathe, this magnificent accumulation of knowledge with which the general mind is enriched, the power it has given us over nature, and the increased vigour our intellects may draw from it, for further and nobler conquests—in spite of all these, the present generation has still to blush for many of the self-same impediments to the study of truth under which our predecessors laboured—with them, indeed, the misfortunes of their times and circumstances; with us, wilful and self-imposed.

“People complain of false theories,” was the remark of a distinguished medical teacher; “save me from false facts.” It has, for instance, unfortunately been the opprobrium of medical science, and some of its collateral branches, that scarcely any great question can

arise, involving the nature and operation of those wide-wasting diseases which sweep myriads of our race to the tomb, without the professors of the healing art being split into parties—I might almost call them factions—contending with all the indiscriminate zeal of rival politicians. In the intemperate heat of controversy, how often has it happened that the main facts of a medical discussion of vital interest are seen or related only through the medium of a favourite theory, and thus for every useful purpose perverted, falsified, or suppressed. Thus, in one of the most beneficent of human occupations, the love of victory, the pride of theory or of education, the spirit of party, and sometimes, too, the meaner excitement of personal dislike, or envy, or professional rivalry, is suffered to overshadow and darken the most important, and perhaps the most obvious truths. I do not select the quarrels of physicians for special censure. Various circumstances of my life have brought me much in contact with that profession. I am no scoffer at medicine. The more I have seen of the profession, and especially of the application of their skill, on the great scale of hospitals and other public institutions, exhibiting there “the power of art, without the show,” the more has their art gained on my confidence, their knowledge on my respect, and their personal character on my esteem. It is on these very accounts that the occasional supremacy of inferior and worldly motives over the simple love

of truth, on such subjects, and amongst such men, is the more to be lamented.

Who would not smile, if such a man there be ?

Who would not mourn, if Atticus were he ?

But theirs is no singular pre-eminence in this melancholy subjection of the reason to the inferior active faculties and the consequent perversion of its most important conclusions. Why is it that doubt and darkness still seem to hang around so many of the great truths of political science, of moral government, of religious faith ? Much of this doubt we must unquestionably allow to arise from the nature of the subjects themselves, and much from that of our own minds, too dwarfish to grasp the things which partake of infinity and eternity—too dim-sighted to trace the deep and intricate windings of our own spirits and hearts. But how much also from the evil passions and the worldly interests that intrude themselves unbidden into all moral inquiry, nor fear to tread with unhallowed feet in the very sanctuary of the Most High ?

Among the views of futurity described by Milton as having been exhibited from the “specular mount” to the cleansed and opened eyes of our first parents, is that of the temptation and fall of that grave race of men, whose lives

Religious, titled them the Sons of God ;

* * * * *

Just men who seem'd, and all their study bent
To worship God aright, and know his works,
Not hid.—

Just men and grave as they were, yet are they beguiled by the blandishments, and inflamed by the charms of the beauteous offspring of the tents of wickedness, and ignobly yield up to them "all their virtue, all their fame!"

This seems to me no unapt symbol of the effect of those intellectual blandishments and desires that beguile and lead astray the learned and the wise, the student and the professed teacher of truth, in their most serious studies ; that can inflame with the spirit of party, and the rage of fanaticism, even the peaceful study of the learning and languages of antiquity as bearing upon the interpretation and exposition of Scripture. Alas, for "the iniquities of our holy things." Let it suffice to have thus indicated what I could not pass by in silence, nor yet dwell upon without the hazard of useless offence, or the touching upon topics foreign to such an occasion as this. To trace out accurately the working of these mental maladies, in reference to the intellectual processes and conclusions of the theologian, demands a deeper and more familiar insight into the morbid anatomy of mind, and a steadier and bolder hand in the dissection, than I can flatter myself to possess.

The influence of the same or similar passions and

dispositions, in thwarting or misdirecting the energies of the mind, and producing the worst evils of false knowledge where true knowledge is most bounteous of its fruits for the public good, may be observed, with still greater distinctness, in the doctrines of politics and political economy, of rational jurisprudence, and of civil administration. The meagre outlines of those doctrines as they are taught in the text-book and the lecture-room, may be clear, consistent, and undisputed ; but once reduce them to practice, and how does that appearance of certainty vanish away ! What contradictions about matters of fact ! what collision of argument ! How little of any principle received with real and confessed authority, by all sides, and at all times ! What single doctrine is to be found, the reception or denial of which may not be made the universal creed of opposing parties, each, in turn, maintaining or denying, as such profession may give countenance to a favourite measure, or suit the policy of a favourite leader ? Nevertheless, every part of the theory of civil polity, varied as it may occasionally be by circumstances of expediency in its application, must be susceptible of the highest moral certainty, since the whole is founded on general and unvarying laws of human nature, more complicated, but little less regular, than those of physical being. Oh, if the desire of truth, as the means of public good, alone animated and governed all political controversy, how soon would these apparent disagreements vanish, these

contradictory assertions and jarring arguments dwindle in appearance into what they are in reality, either verbal differences, or partial, and therefore imperfect, views of the same broad principle. Men must doubtless always differ in their judgment of the expediency of measures, for they must still be short-sighted as to the present, and blind as to the future. They will always have passions, and must therefore always be subject to occasional delusion from the arts of the flatterer and the demagogue ; and they may too often, in moments of excited feeling, follow and shout in the train of an unworthy favourite. But let any great truth, involving, at all times, and under all circumstances, the good of the whole, or the happiness and liberty of many, be once firmly settled, and understood, as well as confessed in words, by all, and then you have a great landmark erected to prevent the encroachments of fraud or force upon private rights or the public weal. Such admitted principles become the citadels of refuge, where the champions of truth and freedom, if at any time borne down by the overwhelming throng of faction, or scattered and divided from each other by feuds, jealousies, and accidents, may meet and rally together, and raising high the banner of acknowledged, and venerated, and long-cherished principle, call the people to the rescue of their rights. In exact proportion to the honesty and fairness with which the wise and eloquent have been accustomed to expound, and the people to hold and cherish such principles, is the

strength and the might of the returning surge, sweeping before it alike the devices of the crafty and the power of the tyrant. But, wo to the people amongst whom such doctrines and principles are but the changing pass-words and countersigns of political warfare ! Long must they suffer whatever ills the artful or the ignorant leader may inflict upon them, in his march onward towards the prize of his ambition.

The implicit devotion to truth is not only a positive virtue in itself, but it includes or implies many others. It implies, of course, if not an entire exemption from the malignant, envious, and selfish vices, at least the power of perceiving them in our own breasts, and of bringing them into subjection to reason and conscience, whenever they impede the right exercise of the judgment. It implies also the possession and practice of several distinct and positive virtues. That patience of labour and endurance of disappointment, such as, in the active concerns of life, preserve the even balance of the faculties, fit them to all the duties of society, and bear the possessor steadily over the tossing billows of adversity, are also the great secret of scientific acquirement and discovery. It was in this alone that the meek-spirited Newton felt and confessed his superiority to common men. It was this unpretending virtue that gave energy and success to his unrivalled mathematical sagacity, and that combined the gigantic powers of his reason and invention with a laborious and unrivalled minuteness of ob-

servation and experiment. This virtue may be sometimes the offspring of an enthusiastic love of knowledge; but it is then most perfect and most beautiful when it grows up, side by side, and from the same root, with its twin virtue of Humility. The impatience of long-sustained attention, the avidity for plausible hypothesis, the disregard for facts that militate against favourite theories, are all of them the natural fruits of proud self-confidence. It is this inflated vanity that so often induces the moral or political reasoner to rear his theory upon so slight a foundation of reality, and when it is once reared, to repose so complacently upon his fancied laurels, or to rouse himself from his flattering dreams, only to heap scorn and obloquy upon the heads of those who oppose or who doubt. On the contrary, it is the deep-felt sense, the familiar and intimate conviction, that man is but darkly and imperfectly wise, whilst nature is great, and its Creator infinite, that prepare the mind for laborious study and patient inquiry—for the ready sacrifice of long-cherished notions and of fancied learning—for the prostration and subjection of the whole man to truth, and to truth alone. But from this very lowliness springs up another, and an opposite, yet not contradictory virtue. It is that of manly independence of judgment. For, the truth, once found, is acknowledged without a rival, and estimated as above all price. What is it to such a meek but sincere inquirer, that the fashion of the world is against him—that grave authority frowns

upon him—that old familiar friends denounce his motives, his judgment, or his character! He has sought for a better good than they or theirs can bestow, and he has gained it. He has laboured to learn that which would make him wiser and better, and others happier. That knowledge has seized upon his intellect and his affections as with a giant's grasp. It has entered into his soul as a beam of living light. There is no place left there for the creeping things of darkness, for fear, for selfishness, for vanity, for false shame. He knows that the fabric of his belief is firm and solid; for it rests on the deep and low foundation of an humble, and therefore a true estimation of himself. Founded as it is on the rock of humility, built up by patient industry, the breath of popular favour or censure passes by it unheeded, and the tempest of persecution beats on it in vain.

It is on this spirit of firm and conscientious reliance upon the cautious and deliberate conclusions of the judgment that Truth and Reason must mainly depend for their general diffusion and reception. It unfortunately happens, that in many parts of human knowledge, and more especially in those involving moral or political considerations or consequences, that interests and prejudices, as well as strong habits, are commonly identified with the received opinions of the day, whatever they may be. Mental indolence, long contented to doze over its present notions, is offended when the torch of discovery flashes upon its slumbers. Pedantry is indignant at beholding

all its fancied wealth swept away, as mere rubbish, by the bold teacher of newer and better knowledge. Ancient and time-honoured authority sees with alarm its influence shaken, and its decisions appealed from. The civil power, in some times and countries—in our own, much more frequently—the popular prejudice is called upon to put down the innovator, who, in his own defence, has no weapons to use but those of argument and evidence. Unless, therefore, the hapless teacher of unpalatable novelty can find, in the minds of the well-informed portion of society, not only candour of judgment, but independence in asserting and maintaining that judgment, his arguments and evidence must lie smothered, for year after year, till the advance of improvement prepares another generation to receive with joy what their fathers rejected—not from ignorance, but from mental timidity.

There is another view of this subject, which strikes me as peculiarly important, in regard to our own state of society. It is the consequence of many circumstances in our lot, (most of them very happy ones,) that our society is constantly divided into organized parties,—and I use the word party in its broadest signification, without limiting or applying it to the mere political parties of the day. Now, the certain tendency of the united and concentrated action of parties is to extremes. In their heated furnace, all individuality of thought and sentiment is melted down into one common mass. But the public good generally

lies somewhere between the two extremes of either side. The truth, whatever it may be, for which all profess to seek and to contend, most likely embraces many particulars, which may be held partly on each side. It is the manly independence of private judgment alone, boldly exercised and frankly expressed on both sides, that can best check this excess of fanaticism, or bigotry, or faction, (as the case may be,) and soonest and most safely bring the public mind to its right and equable poise.

It is true, that when free discussion is allowed, the very opposition and counteraction of extremes may prevent much of the practical evil of any speculative opinion held by a sect or a party. Yet, if this result is not obtained by the independence and moderation of the individual members of such sect or party, tempering the violence, or moderating the extravagance, of those with whom they act, it is the late fruit of sad regrets for mutual error and common injury. Such flames, like the fires that sweep over our forests, may indeed be checked by other flames *counter-burning* in an opposite direction, leaving nothing to prey upon between their meeting fury; but, ere their rage is spent, the pride of the forest is humbled, and lies low in black and smouldering ruins.

Nor is the influence of the benevolent affections, that of the strong desire of doing good towards our fellows, that of the sense of public duty, to be overlooked in estimating the advantages that intellectual pursuits may

derive from moral rectitude. I am willing to allow that there is, on the whole, too great a tendency, in the present age, to look only at the direct and immediate utility of our studies and researches, forgetting, or not knowing, that for any truly great form of intellectual production, the love of the pursuit itself, and the conscious delight of innate power in obtaining success, must themselves be ultimate ends, though they may not be the only ones. An eloquent and profound philosopher of our own day, himself one of the most successful of discoverers, as well as practical of teachers, (Sir John Herschel,) has well and indignantly repelled the insult upon the native dignity of speculative science, offered by those reasoners, who, placing it in the light of a mere appendage to our physical pleasures and conveniences, ask at every turn, "*Cui bono*?"—"to what good do your researches tend?" "This question," says this indignant philosopher, "is one which he who loves knowledge for its own sake, and enjoys, as a rational being should enjoy, the mere contemplation of harmonious and mutually dependent truths, can seldom hear, without a sense of humiliation. He feels that there is a lofty and disinterested pleasure in his speculations, which ought to exempt him from any such questionings; communicating as they do to his own mind the purest happiness (after the exercise of the benevolent and moral feelings) of which human nature is susceptible, and tending to the injury of no one, he might allege this alone as a sufficient and direct

reply to those who, having themselves little capacity and less relish for intellectual pursuits, are constantly repeating upon him this inquiry.”*

To this lofty defence, the history of mathematics, of chemistry, of medicine, of mineralogy, has enabled the philosopher to add another ground of justification, of which the merest utilitarian must feel the force. It is this—that speculations, apparently the most unprofitable, are precisely those from whence the most useful applications have emanated.

All this is true. It is not, however, the less true, that the kindling desire of doing good—of bettering the condition of others—of rescuing our species from the ills of disease or of ignorance under which it suffers, is a most effective and sustaining stimulus to the mind, the best preservative from its directing its energies to paltry objects, the surest antidote to vanity, selfishness, and whatever evil passions may intrude themselves into the study, and flit before the eyes of the contemplative sage, clouding his vision of the great, the distant, or the infinite. It prevents him, moreover, from suffering his contemplations to evaporate in ideal generalities, and prompts him to give them greater accuracy, as well as surer certainty, by bringing them to the test of reality, as applied to human uses and wants. It often adds largely to the treasures of pure science, by first exciting the man of thought to transfer the truths of abstract reasoning, or of

* Herschel's Discourse on the Study of Natural Philosophy.

curious investigation, to the daily uses and wants of life, and then, in that very application, furnishing him evidence, illustration, and experience reflecting back new lights upon his previous theoretic wisdom, and so guiding him onward to further and surer conclusions. The earnest desire of benevolent service to mankind may not only prompt the mind to exertion, but can also lead it to the noblest results. In all the arrangements of nature, physical or spiritual, a vast, far-reaching, and comprehensive benevolence is seen to preside, having in all its numerous and complicated laws and phenomena most excellent and beneficent ends. The philosopher or the scholar, who, cherishing a reverent but confiding reliance upon his Creator's beneficent designs, is warmed with the desire of benefiting his race by gaining for them a better knowledge of nature or of themselves, will often find—has often found—in the undefined anticipations of his benevolence, the sure indications of glorious truths, or the means of admirable discovery—truths and discoveries to which he could never have been led by mere cold reason.

So too, in regard to the creations of Art, of Taste, and of literary Talent. The simple desire of doing good cannot inspire genius; but, in watching over and directing its efforts, in silently excluding from its productions all that is gross in sense or bad in feeling, in suggesting ideas of benevolent tendency, and in communicating to the mind's action the healthy glow of kindly

sentiment or of philanthropic ardour, it insensibly gives to its works a dignity, an elevation, and a power of expression, such as art, or taste, or learning, or even genius alone could never have attained, raising them to a higher stage of mental excellence, and clothing them with the loveliness and the glory of moral beauty.

Above all, such a desire of benevolent utility compels the student to reveal to others the latent treasures of his own intellect, and so secures him from that frequent bane of the meditative mind, the tendency to suffer his philosophy and his invention, his logical acuteness, his capacity for comprehension and generalization, to remain the hidden, and hoarded, and perhaps uncounted and unarranged treasures of his interior being, to whose delicious recesses he retires from the cares and duties of society, content to find his employment, his solace, and his joys (like the visionary recluse portrayed by the vigorous pencil of Johnson) in the invisible riot of the mind, the secret prodigality of being, secure from detection, and careless of reproach.*

It has happened that the current of my thoughts has led me (somewhat contrary to my first intention) to keep chiefly in view the influence of moral causes, either upon the understanding as engaged in ascertaining the facts and laws of external nature, or else upon the speculative and the practical reason exerted in their respective spheres of meditation upon truth or duty, leaving

* Rambler.

almost untouched the effects of such causes upon the genius and the works of pure literature. Little space as I have left to myself to dwell on this topic, I cannot wholly pass over all consideration of that world of imagination, invention, taste, criticism, history, wit, pleasantry, and observation of life and manners, contained in the compass of a nation's literature. It forms the very atmosphere of our social life ; it acts upon society imperceptibly but continually, and in proportion as the life-giving or the destructive principles predominate in its constitution, braces the frame with health, or secretly instils disease and death into the system. To bear a fitting part in the great social and moral reform which philanthropy eagerly anticipates and benevolence labours to hasten on, the literary man must purify his own heart, and consecrate his talent as a holy gift. For though he aspires not to handle sacred things, yet in the recreation his productions afford to leisure—in the entertainment and instruction he provides for youth and for ignorance, he is indirectly acting upon the well-being of nations, and tinging with good or evil the immortal destinies of whole generations. Do not imagine that it is easy to conform in this respect to the popular requirements by a simple effort of volition. To write or think with effect to great and good issues, the moral improvement must begin within.

In one of the minor poems of Wordsworth, he describes the long-lost Earl of Clifford, who had been from his childhood estranged from his ancestral halls

and castles, and had wandered for years as a shepherd boy, at length restored to his hereditary honours, and greeted at the stately feast by the family minstrel with fervid strains, such as his steel-clad forefathers had loved to hear. The bard paints in glowing strains the ancient glories of the Cliffords, won, in many a bloody battlefield, by the side of the Richard, and the Edwards, and the fifth Harry, of England, until he sees in fancy the scholar shepherd, who now fills their baronial seat, throwing aside his books, and rushing forth to add new honours to the ancient escutcheon of his house.

Armour, rusting on the walls,
On the blood of Clifford calls.
Quell the Scot, exclaims the lance;
Bear me to the heart of France,
Is the longing of the shield.
Tell thy name, thou trembling field,—
Field of death, where'er thou be,
Groan thou with our victory !
Happy day, and mighty hour,
When our shepherd, with his power,
Mail'd and horsed, with lance and sword,
To his ancestors restored,
Like a re-appearing star,
Like a glory from afar,
First shall head the flock of war !

What is the effect of this stormy invocation ? With equal philosophy and beauty, the poet adds :

Alas ! the fervent harper did not know
That for a tranquil soul the lay was framed,

Who, long compell'd in humble walks to go,
Was soften'd into feeling, soothed and tamed.
Love had he found in huts where poor men lay ;
His daily teachers had been woods and rills ;
The silence that is in the starry sky,
The sleep that is among the lonely hills.

There was not, there could not be, any sympathy between the fiery and warlike minstrel and his mild lord. He could have no access to the heart of his hearer. To gain that access, it was necessary that he should have reformed his own desires, tempers, and habits ; his ambition or admiration must have been raised to purer and better things than the feats of warlike violence ; he must have taught himself a truer estimate of the value of glory, and of the right materials of happiness. Even so must it be with the author who aspires to obtain and hold any permanent place in the affections of a better age hereafter, or who seeks to find audience among the good and wise of the present time. Even so must it be with him, unless he is content to waste his talent for an ephemeral popularity, or desires, with perverse malignity, to clog the advancing chariot-wheels of Truth and Virtue, thus retarding their victorious march, and delaying, for a few brief hours, the glories of their triumph.

But it may be objected that I speak now of the benign tendency of well-directed literary talent, which is not denied. But what is the probable effect of such moral correction upon the brilliancy and power of the talent itself ? Will it not be sobered down into insipid correct-

ness, reduced to a tame though virtuous mediocrity? Will not its daring originality of thought, its gay corruscations of wit, be for ever banished from our literature? There will be no more Voltaires, no more Byrons. Nay, will not all poetry lose its high, romantic charm, its chivalrous grace, and all the intense interest it obtained from the portraiture of energetic and tumultuous passion? Shall we not then be forced to yawn over the weary realities of life, until we sigh for the return of ancient genius, with all its ills. To apply the language of a lamented friend*—the scholar will exclaim—

Ye pastoral scenes, by fancy wrought;
 Ye pageants of the loftier thought;
 Creations proud! majestic things,
 Heroes, and demi-gods, and kings!
 Return, with all of shepherd's love,
 Or old Romance that pleased before.

Ye forms that are not of the earth,
 Of grace, of valour, and of worth;
 Ye bright abstractions, by the thought,
 Like the great master's pictures, wrought
 To the ideal's shadowy mien,
 From beauties, fancied, dreamt, or seen!

Ye speaking sounds, that poet's ear
 Alone, in nature's voice, can hear;
 Thou full conception, vast and wide,
 Hour of the lonely minstrel's pride;
 As when projection gave, of old,
 Alchemy's visionary gold!

Return, return!—

* Robert C. Sands.

I see no sufficient reason for such lament or such fears. The passions of men, and the mighty energies they can excite, are not the less capable, either of affording instruction, or of seizing upon the attention, and engaging the feelings, because they are viewed and exhibited by the poet, the moralist, or the historian, from a loftier point of view, and through a purer medium. The materials to be used by genius—the “beauties, fancied, dreamt, or seen,” will remain the same; but how much nobler the work, when its rules of taste are drawn “from the upright heart and pure,”—when

The full conception, vast and wide,
Hour of the lonely minstrel's pride,

comes with an inspiration, not of an earth-born muse, but given and governed by the heaven-descended Urania, the sister and the companion of celestial Wisdom. What is our own experience on the subject? In the fictions of epic poetry, what is the degree of interest called forth by the cold-blooded and perfidious Æneas, or any of the butchering heroes, who have followed him, like his own “*fortemque Gyam, fortemque Cloanthum*,” formed, by the herd of imitators, on the model of pagan heroism, compared with Tasso's touching and pathetic adumbration of his own character, in the religious soldier, the faithful lover, the true friend, the brave, the modest, the melancholy Tancred? Again, in a lighter range of literature. The young adventurers, the gipsies, the pedants, and the vil-

lains, are the same beings in Scott and in Fielding. But how different is their aspect and hue as painted by the manly, moral sagacity of the one, and the profligate and sarcastic cynicism of the other! In which, I ask, is the power of genius most conspicuous?

But this is not all. Critics have asserted, and, I think, very justly, that the age of epics is gone by, and the fund of heroic passion and story of the old school quite exhausted. They might add, that so too are nearly all the materials whence the "wits of Charles's days," and the "men of wit and pleasure about town," (as the phrase then was,) during the time of Anne and the Georges, could extract mirth or amusement. In the fine arts, something of the same kind has taken place, and, in consequence, the most successful artists of our day have thrown aside the tales of licentious mythology and the bloody martyrdoms and extravagances of what may be termed the epic of their art, and sought to give pleasure and gain reputation by portraying the true but gentler features of nature, and the incidents, graces, and affections of domestic life. If, then, in literature, nearly all that frenzied passion or worldly gaiety can suggest, has been already said, quite as well as it is likely to be said again, it is only from a holier inspiration, a more enlightened morality, a more benevolent sympathy with human weakness and suffering, and a keener admiration of the beautiful and the good, that we are now to hope for the greatest of all literary charms, that of Novelty. If, then, America is to have a literature truly her own,

and not the shadow of a shade of European excellence, *here* let her sons seek for originality. Here are the deep springs of thought and feeling, that may gush forth in sparkling rills of native poetry, or well over in broad-brimming floods of eloquence and reason. *Hæ tibi erunt artes.*

Upon you, young gentlemen, and your fellow-graduates, who, at this joyous season of academic festivities, are issuing in crowds from the sister colleges of New England, it rests to prove by the evidence of your lives and conducts, the soundness of the doctrine I have endeavoured to enforce in theory. From the earliest settlement of New England it was the unceasing aim of the venerable fathers of her civil polity to make education go hand-in-hand with moral training and to consecrate learning with religious feeling. Let it be the boast of their sons not to separate what their fathers had joined. Whatever competition there may be, between other portions of this fair union and the New England states for political ascendancy or for the fame of their statesmen and warriors, in one respect there can, as yet, be no rivalry. In your hands is mainly the literature, the instruction of this wide land. Of our native poetry—such as at all deserves that abused name—nearly all, of our general literature much, of our science very much, of our metaphysical and theological speculation by far the greater part, of the actual education of the country, in schools and colleges nearly the whole, is of New England origin. For this, I, at least, can feel no jealousy. Owing, as I do, my birth and

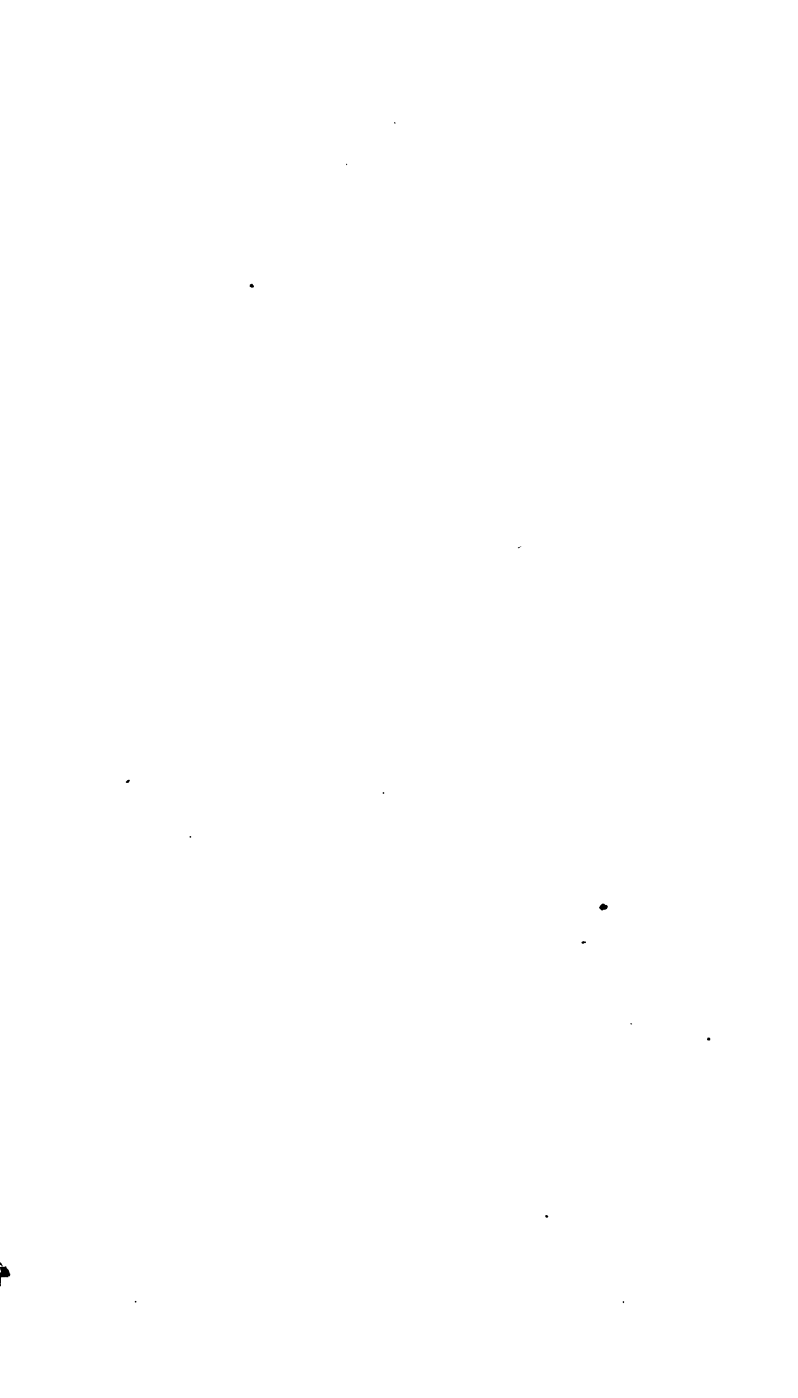
education to another state, and proud to claim a descent from another stock than yours, that of the land of scholars and patriots, of Grotius and Dewitt, I cannot but remember also that I have New England blood in my veins, that many of my happiest youthful days were passed in her pleasant villages, and that my best education was bestowed by the more than parental care of one of the wisest and most excellent of her sons.* Imitating, therefore, the language in which an ancient scholar expressed his attachment for all that partook of his common Gaelic descent, I too can say, that "*Nil Nov-Anglicum à me alienum puto.*"†

It is therefore, that in the words of truth and seriousness I express to you the fervent hope, that in you may be exhibited the right and happy connection of moral beauty with scientific and literary talent, that your hearts, enlarged by benevolence, may communicate a vigorous and healthy action to the understanding, that your genius, kindled by living coals from the altar of the Most High, may blaze up into a bright, and enduring, and lofty, and unclouded flame.

* Wm. S. Johnson, of Connecticut.

† The allusion is to a fine passage of G. Buchanan, ending, "*Nil Hibernicum à me alienum puto.*" I quote from memory, and cannot recall the rest.





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